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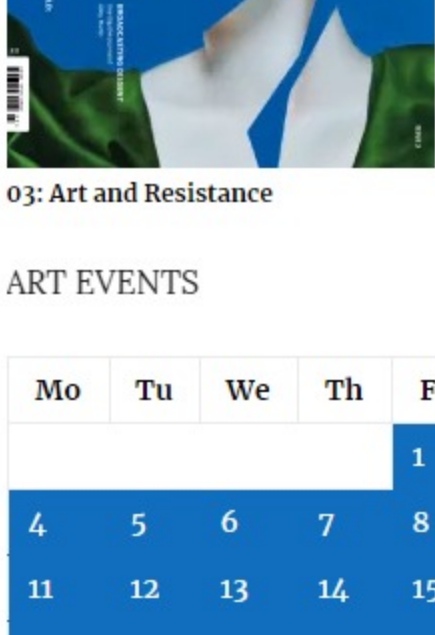
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Painterly Process and Human Traces

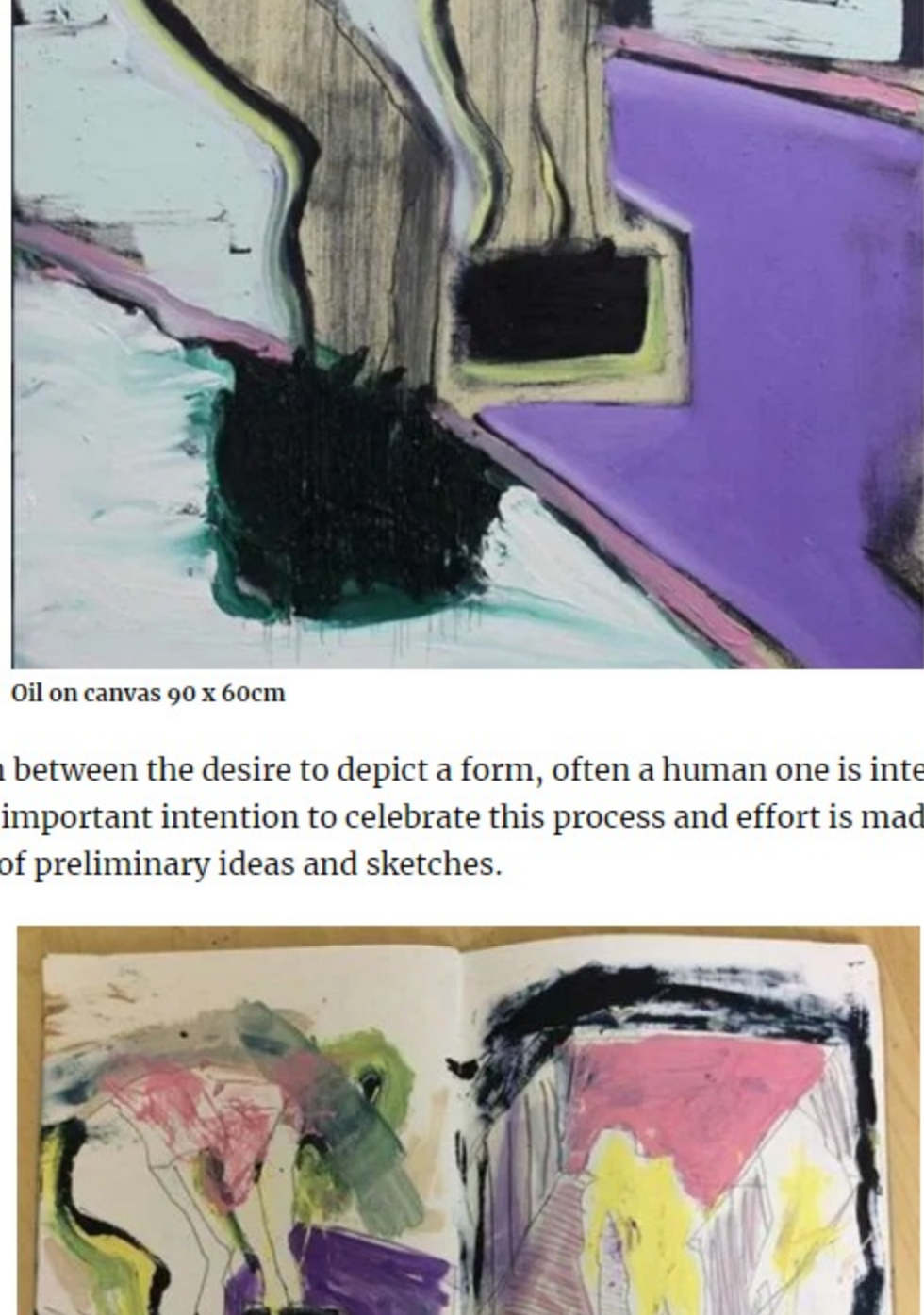
CONTEMPORARY FIGURATION IN THE PRACTICE OF CONNOR ROBERTSON

© 06/07/2018 Michael Eden In Art



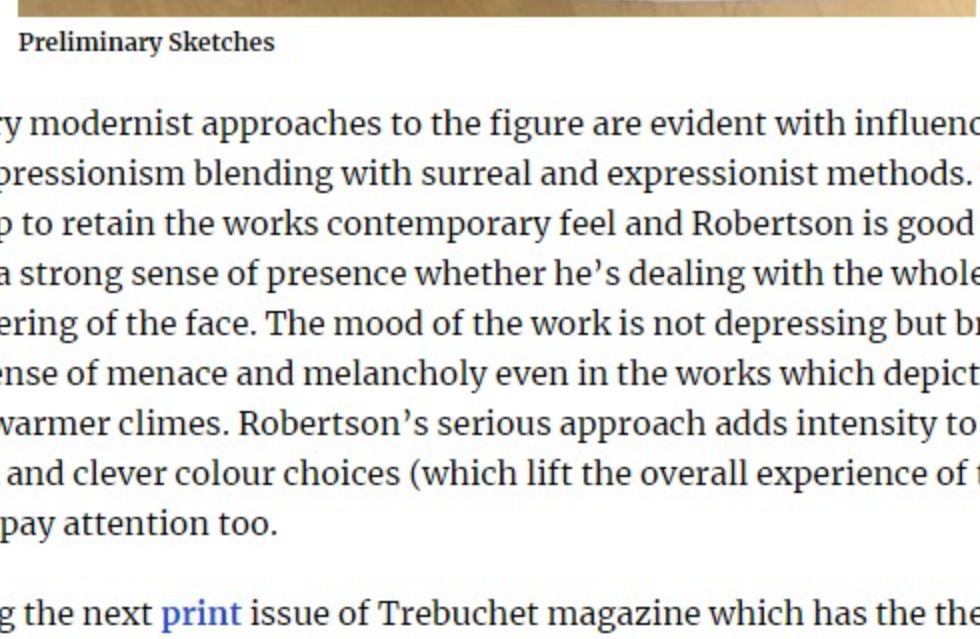
Connor Robertson is an emerging artist who has already been recognised for his evocative treatment of the human form, showing work and garnering attention from the press; Robertson's paintings have featured in the Irish Art Review (view [here](#)) The Galway Art Fair (view [here](#)) and at the Solstice Arts Centre in Navan (view [here](#))

There is strong sense of process which sees the evidence of the paintings progress evidenced in finished works; forms are indicated and delineated with interiors left purposefully ambiguous (see below) This looseness in paint handling gives the work a fresh energetic feel and leaves the viewer with some work to do in terms of filling in and interpreting forms. Movement is suggested by sweeps of paint and the contrast between the butting up of impasto marks against delicate line.



Oil on canvas 90 x 60cm

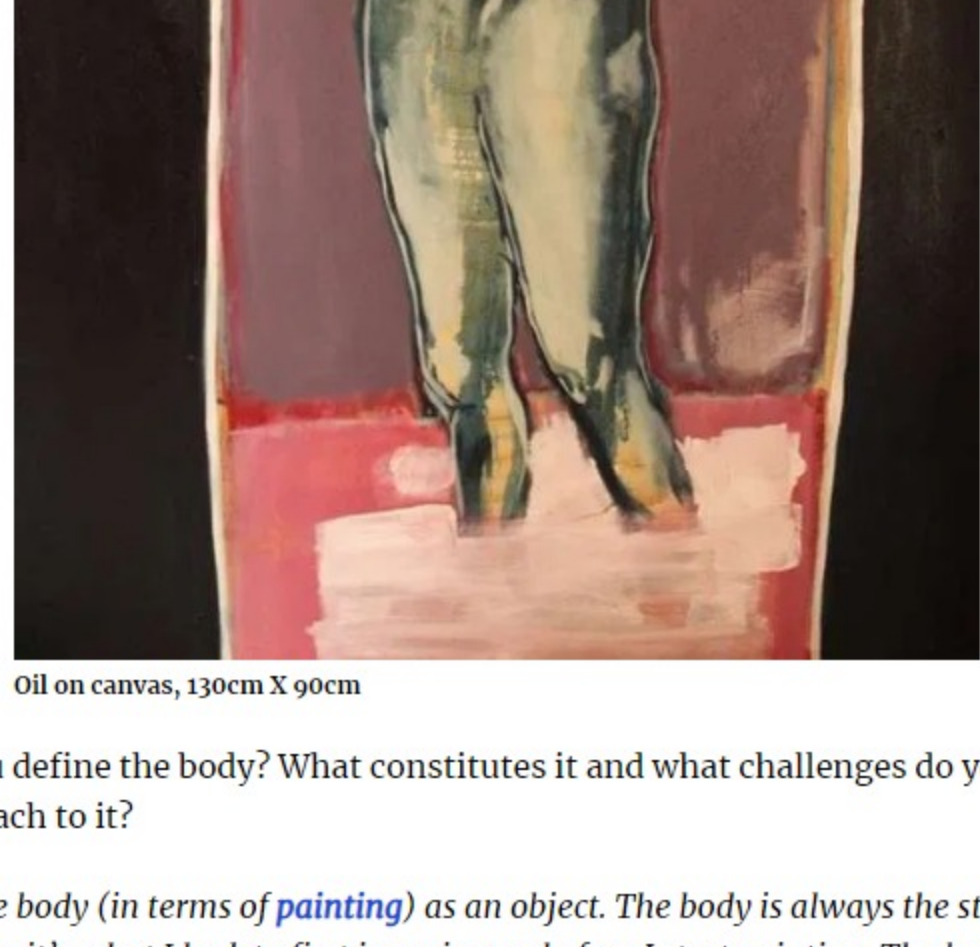
The tension between the desire to depict a form, often a human one is interrupted by the equally important intention to celebrate this process and effort is made to retain the impact of preliminary ideas and sketches.



Preliminary Sketches

20th century modernist approaches to the figure are evident with influences from abstract expressionism blending with surreal and expressionist methods. The colour choices help to retain the works contemporary feel and Robertson is good at giving his figures a strong sense of presence whether he's dealing with the whole form or a closer rendering of the face. The mood of the work is not depressing but brooding there is a sense of menace and melancholy even in the works which depict aboriginal peoples in warmer climes. Robertson's serious approach adds intensity to the lyrical brush work and clever colour choices (which lift the overall experience of the work) an artist to pay attention too.

Anticipating the next print issue of Trebuchet magazine which has the theme of 'the body' we spoke to Connor Robertson about his practice, obsessions and responses to contemporary issues affecting the human form.



Oil on canvas, 130cm X 90cm

How do you define the body? What constitutes it and what challenges do you face in your approach to it?

I think of the body (in terms of painting) as an object. The body is always the starting point of a painting, it's what I look to first in an image before I start painting. The body starts as a couple of basic shapes or lines and everything else develops around it. The shape of the body often dictates what kind of painting it will be.

In what way do you feel you've pushed your conception and application to the body?

I've pushed through some pretty stubborn ideas I had about how a figure had to be painted and how it had to look a certain way. Once I became more interested in the physicality of paint itself and how it can really speak to the viewer depending on how it's applied I feel my work really got legs. I started painting the body with feeling rather than logic as cheesy as it sounds. When it looks right, it's right even if it's not right from an academic point of view.



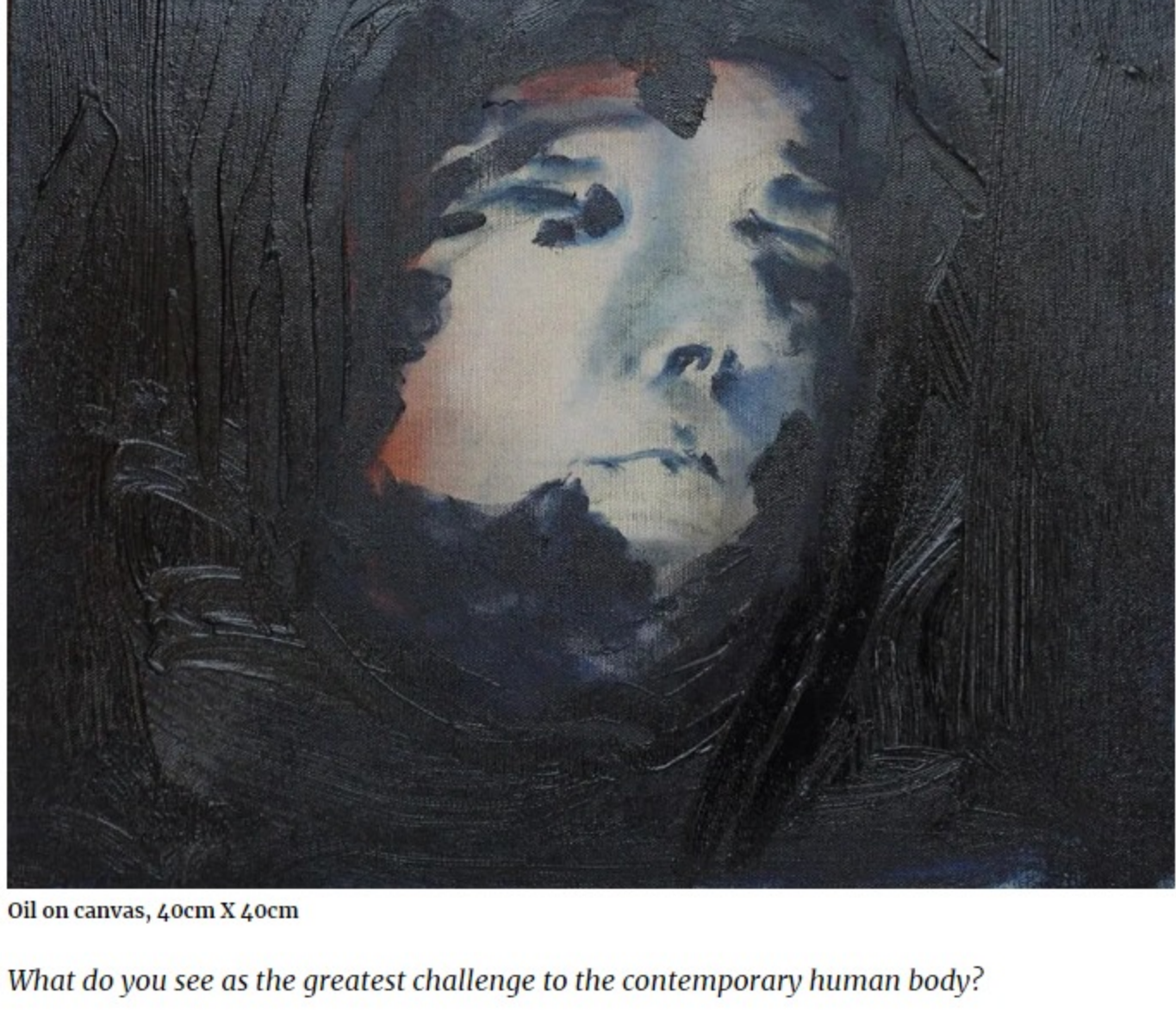
Oil on canvas, 140cm X 125cm

What potential do you see in bodies that most other people don't or haven't?

I don't see more or less potential in bodies than others do, maybe I see them in a different way but I don't really see them as something of value. I see the body as interesting in terms of painting but sometimes the body becomes more interesting within the painting than it is in reality.

Are you conscious of your own body in the same as the bodies in your work? How so?

That depends on how much time I have spent painting. If I've been in the studio for days then it takes a little while to remove yourself from that way of thinking, you start seeing people and scenes as paintings in terms of shapes and colour and you try to figure out how you're going to paint it.



Oil on canvas, 60cm X 60cm

What do you see as the greatest challenge to the contemporary human body?

The human body has a lot to deal with, from environmental factors to societal factors. The fast paced lifestyle, high job demands and little time for oneself really wear down on people.

Why and when did you choose the body as a medium for your work?

I started focusing on bodies and the figure years before I started art college. I attended a PLC course after school where I became good friends with another guy attending and we started kind of competing in a way as to who could draw a face the best or get the proportions and perspective right. We spent a long time trying to perfect 'the line', this all continued into art college and I enjoyed painting the body so I kept doing it. I loosened up in my fourth year of college and became less interested in the perfect representation of the body and just started really enjoying painting the body in a much more abstracted way.

Whose work regarding the physical human body do you admire and why?

The list is so long and it has really changed over time, Francis Bacon is definitely up there near the top but I actually used to really dislike his work until I started painting in a more abstracted way. Michael Armitage is a recent favourite, he's got an amazing use of colour and his figures have a great presence. Other favourites are Anthony Cudahy, Colin Mac Athlaich, Rhys Trussler and Olav Mathisen.



Connor Robertson 2017

Describe the technique behind your work?

I always start with either an image I find interesting or I make a collage that I feel will translate well into painting. I move into drawing an outline of the figure out in paint and then I kind of fill in the blanks depending on the image. I don't do any preparatory work beforehand but a couple of two or three minute drawings just to get the composition right. I like to figure it all out on the canvas and just see how it goes.

Where do you find inspiration?

I tend to spend a lot of time on the internet so I come across lots of images daily, some of which get worked into paintings. During my final year in college I spent a long time looking at archive photos from the early 1900's in Australia and I created my end of year show around them. Recently I've been playing around a lot with collages and interiors with little detail, I'm moving to Thailand for a few months this October which I'm sure will have an influence on my work.

The body a place of permanence or change?

The body is definitely a place of change for me, every moment it's all constantly changing and moving. It makes the body hugely interesting.



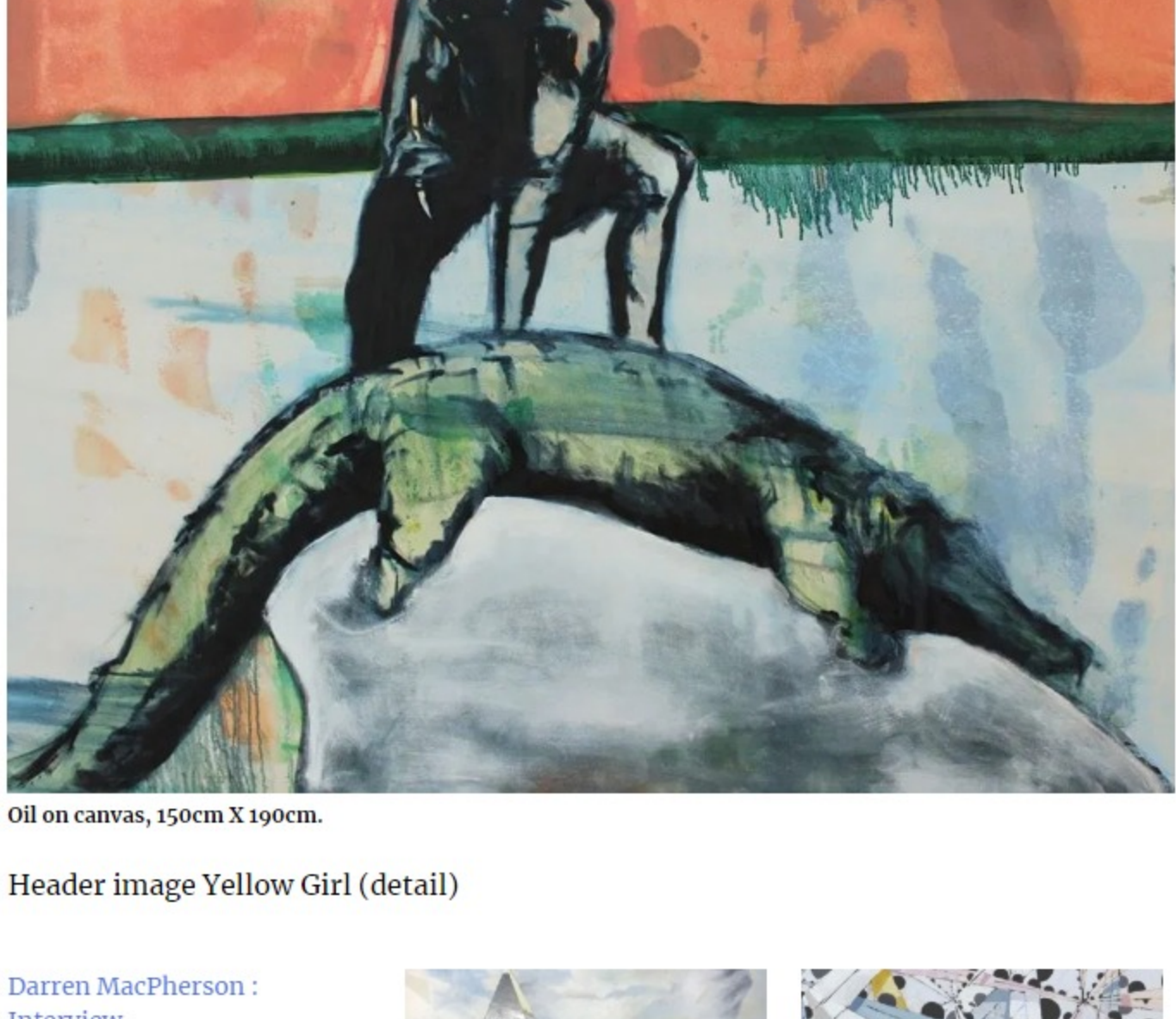
Oil on board, 50cm X 40cm.

If you could change one thing about how humans are constructed (if only to make your work easier) what would it be?

To make my work easier? I would add more sharp edges to the body, more places for light to catch.

With developments on virtual reality, body extensions and vat grown organs will the changing way we view our bodies affect your work?

I don't think it will, I have more of an interest in primitive compositions and images, how the figure occupies a space with less emphasis on a narrative.



Oil on canvas, 150cm X 100cm.

Header image Yellow Girl (detail)

Darren MacPherson : Interview
It's never about the figure, always about the painting. I know some people will view it as erotica but I can't control that...
18/02/2014
In "Art"

Three-sided World: Interview with Stuart Jones
07/11/2019
In "Features"

Phillip Allen Body & Mind
24/02/2018
In "Art"

About Michael Eden - 77 Articles
Michael Eden is the Arts Editor for Trebuchet Magazine, an artist and researcher working in London and the south east, his artistic practice is concentrated on painting and he divides his time between this and lecturing in art history and contextual studies.

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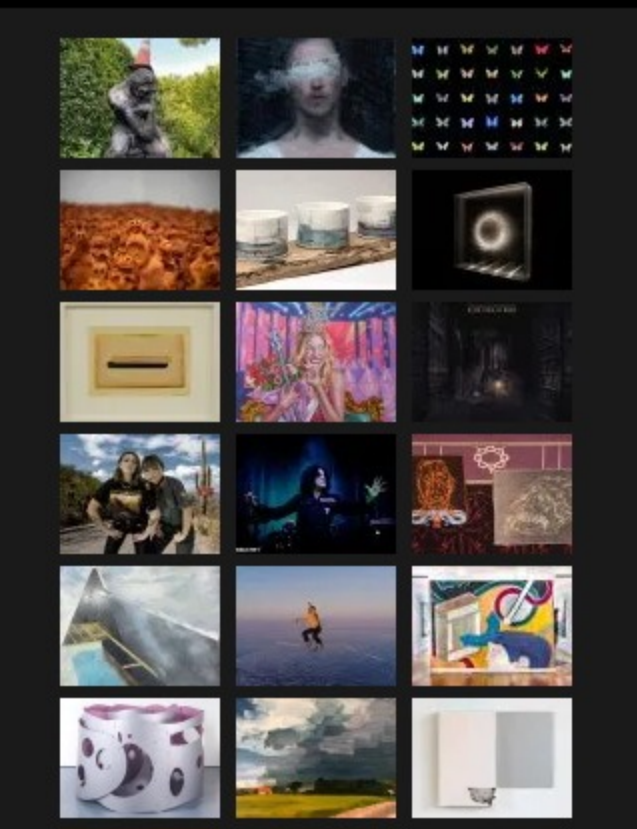
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